

Addison County E&D Committee Quarterly Meeting

September 15, 2021

The Addison County E&D Committee provides oversight and guidance for Tri-Valley Transit's programs to assist elders and persons with disabilities in Addison County. Programs supported by the committee get users out of their homes to medical appointments, to local adult day-care, to senior meal sites and for essential shopping. These services supplement regular transit services in the area, filling in gaps left by programs like Medicaid.

Attendees:

Tim Bradshaw, Jim Moulton, Mike Winslow, Stephanie Stearns, Bill Cunningham, Mary Claire Crogan, Erica Marks, Ingrid Pixley

Minutes:

1. COVID update

TVT has reintroduced volunteer drivers with no real changes. Drivers must be masked in buildings and cars. They are still cleaning vehicles. Screening questions for demand response riders have been reintroduced, and all is going well. TVT is considering reimplementing self-screening for fixed routes, but the process is impractical for all riders.

TVT's Addison region gives out 100+ masks/week. There is a difference in the clientele being served between Addison and Orange Counties. Mary will try targeted marketing to local shelters to remind clients of mask requirements. There haven't been confrontations related to masks. Providing masks hasn't been as much of an issue with volunteer drivers.

State guidance defining close contacts has changed - if someone is vaccinated and within 6' of a positive person, it is not considered close contact unless they start to show symptoms. The guidance change has not impeded TVT's ability to provide transportation

2. Microtransit update

TVT applied for microtransit funding for the Middlebury area. A neighboring region received only one bid at twice the anticipated budget. VTrans has regrouped to release a statewide RFP for all microtransit studies. A draft is ready for release, though the timelines need to be adjusted. Consultants should be on board in 3-6 months.

Bill noted that microtransit offers big potential upside for increasing E&D capacity in Middlebury in particular. Time reported the current Montpelier pilot has been successful.

3. Volunteer shortage

Stephanie reported that some drivers have come back; TVT has 21 now. Riders have also come back and school started increasing demand while limiting some driver availability. The last outreach effort brought in at least two inquiries. Last year TVT had 14 drivers at this time, but the additional drivers often have more limited capacity. Pre-covid they had 32 pre-covid, and the highest ever was 41.

More medical and critical care rides now means the lack of drivers prevents rides for shopping trips. Paratransit demand is putting stress on staff drivers as well. TVT has lost some drivers, but

they are working with clients and providers to ensure rules are being followed to maximize use of drivers.

In response to a question about the capacity of vehicles, TVT noted two drivers have vans and can take multiple passengers, but some clients have trouble getting into vans.

Volunteer fatigue is also an issue which creates concerns regarding safety, and is a growing barrier to meeting demand.

Tim observed that the same situation exists statewide, and is getting worse as requests for non-essential trips increase. TVT's program is the strongest in the state with regard to provision of social/personal rides.

Stephanie observed that the situation is a strain on dispatchers too. They are not accustomed to having to say "no".

Erica offered to send the ad to her Addison volunteers (list of 192 people). Her volunteers want to volunteer once/week for a defined shift. Open ended requests for volunteers do not elicit a response. Mary Claire will send a fresh copy today, and asked if TVT could contact them directly. Erica replied that she is not allowed to share contact information, but could include a personalized note and have them get back in touch with TVT.

4. Employee shortage

In addition to volunteers, TVT needs drivers too. A lack of volunteers leads to increased workload on drivers. CDL drivers have even more limits on hours of driving. TVT has implemented a \$1,000 signing bonus for new staff including drivers.

TVT is entering contract negotiations before the end of the calendar year; the current contract expires June 30, 2022.

5. Wheelchair ramp update

TVT developed a uniform system for evaluating properties. There's now an official checklist of specifications and potential problems. This provides a formal way to reach out to clients to help evaluate their properties, identify problems, and get them fixed.

One problem ramp has been identified (Vergennes area), and they are looking to install a metal ramp before winter.

The new process should increase the confidence of evaluators, riders, family members, and drivers.

6. Plan for dementia training

At some point TVT would like to train drivers, but they probably won't attempt formal training until after the new year - they don't have the capacity. Elderly Services is available as a one time consultant if a driver does need assistance. For now demand for this type of trip is fairly low.

Tim asked if TVT had considered on-line training? Jim explained that it's more a matter that all drivers are maxed out, and it is unrealistic to add this burden of training. If demand were higher there'd be more reason to push the training.

Bill said that, in general, the needs of clients have grown. Partners are very helpful, but it's becoming more challenging to work through all of the clients' needs.

TVT is doing more of all trip types (Critical care, medical, shopping, social/personal, vocational) compared to where they were a year ago. Vaccines have given everyone more confidence to interact with the world. There has been a 25% overall increase in rides provided, but the demand has been met with fewer drivers.

7. Mike will post a Doodle poll to identify availability for a mid-December meeting